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A Christian Exhortation to
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A

CHRISTIAN EXHORTATION

TO

SAILORS,

AND PERSONS ENGAGED IN

A SEA-FARING LIFE.

BY WILLIAM FORSTER, JUN.

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“ They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep. For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distress. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven. Oh, that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men.” PSALM cvii. 23—31.

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CHRISTIAN EXHORTATION,

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I HAVE often meditated upon the nature of a sea-faring life; and in considering the dangers and difficulties, to which many of my fellow-creatures, employed upon the seas, are exposed, my heart has been warmed with strong desire, that they may be more generally acquainted with the consolations of true religion. In this desire, I have wished to remind them of the love of our Heavenly Father, and in few words to beseech them to consider, how far they are endeavouring to live in love to him, and to walk in the way of his commandments.

It is a very precious truth which we find recorded in the Holy Scriptures, that "God is no respecter of persons." (Acts x. 34.) Our almighty Creator has made of one blood all the nations of men that dwell upon the face of the earth; and in his love he makes no distinction between the rich and the poor, the learned and the unlearned: between the inhabitants of one nation, and those of another; but all are children of the same family, created with the gracious design that they should enjoy peace with him while here, and everlasting happiness hereafter. The great work of true religion, to which I now desire to direct your attention, my dear Brethren, appears to me

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to consist in knowing this great and gracious Being, in loving him, in doing his will, and living in his fear. This is the principal business of life; this would make us truly happy. It is for want of knowing and loving God, that there is so much misery and wretchedness in the world, that so many are living without peace, and, as we have reason to fear, dying without hope.

It is from God that we receive all our blessings: it is He that has clothed and fed us: his fatherly eye has been watching over us for good. It is He that has delivered us in danger: and it is of his mercy that our lives are lengthened out to the present day. Oh! how great is his goodness! how much do we owe to Him, from whom we have received all these favours! But he has not only provided for us in those things which concern our present outward condition. He has placed his good Spirit in our hearts, to instruct us in his holy law; and it is by this, that as a kind and tender Father, he is reproving us for our disobedience; and inviting us to forsake every wicked way, and to walk in the path of peace. It is thus that he has made himself known to the children of men in all the former generations of time; and it is in the same manner, that he is manifesting his gracious regard to the inhabitants of the earth, at the present day.

This is the voice of his Wisdom, the invitation of Divine Love. It is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the power of God unto salvation. In our early childhood, this Holy Spirit visits our minds, and reproves us for evil; and as we advance in life, it continues to follow us, pleading with us, and persuading us to turn unto the Lord, and serve him with our whole hearts. But if we resist its power, if we refuse this invitation

of the love of God, and do that which we know to be evil; it condemns us, it brings us into sorrow, and heaviness, and distress. We are afraid of his displeasure; and instead of looking up to him, as to a merciful and tender Father, which his obedient children can do with humble confidence, our hearts are filled with terror, and we look to him as to a just and righteous Judge, who will punish those that rebel against his law.

Now, do you not know something of this divine power? Have you not heard this voice of heavenly wisdom, and been favoured after this manner, with the invitation of Divine Love? Consider then the goodness and mercy of God, and be intreated to receive the visitation of his Holy Spirit. Hear its reproofs, and listen to its instructions. Let it bring to your remembrance the sins of your early lives. Be willing to behold yourselves as you are seen in the sight of Almighty God, and if you feel that you have transgressed his law, and that you are sinners in his holy presence, suffer his righteous judgment, endure the fatherly correction of his powerful hand. But do not despair of his mercy and forgiveness: remember that Jesus Christ our Lord "came into the world to save sinners," (1 Tim. i. 15,) to save the chief among sinners; to save them from sin, and to give them hope in the great mercy of God.

He has given himself for us: yes, he has tasted death for every man. He died for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and that we might be purified to him, and by him. For he came into the world, and fulfilled all righteousness in obedience to his Father's will, not only that he might be a perfect pattern unto us in holiness, meekness, and love; but he has borne our infirmities, and victoriously endured the temp-

tations with which we are tried, that he might manifest his tender compassion with the weakness of our nature. Now, he who has done and suffered so much for poor, rebellious sinners, who was crucified by the hands of cruel men, and who is now ascended into the glory which he had with the Father, before the world began, he is still waiting to receive those that seek him; the language of his love is still the same—"Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." (John vi. 37.) If we embrace the invitation of his love, and come unto him, we shall find all that we want, to render us acceptable to that pure and holy Being, who is, through his beloved Son, seeking our happiness, and everlasting peace.

Christ will then be our Light and our Leader: He will be our strength and our defence. Through his Holy Spirit we shall become more thoroughly instructed in the way of righteousness and peace: we shall not only be more fully convinced of the necessity of denying ourselves of much, to which our evil inclinations are prone, but we shall see, that the way of the cross is a path attended with the purest joys, and most substantial consolations, of which we can possibly partake in this life.—Through our Redeemer our hearts will be strengthened; and we shall be endued with holy courage to acknowledge ourselves his disciples, even in the presence of his enemies. If we thus faithfully follow him, he will defend us in the hour of temptation, and give us the victory over the many lusts of our flesh, and the love of this present world. He will not only deliver and preserve us from that which is evil; but if we live in obedience to his good Spirit, we shall delight in the law of God, we shall love him with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all

our strength, and with all our mind; and we shall love our neighbours as ourselves. (Luke x. 27.) In every nation, and amongst all the different people we meet with in the world, we shall do unto others, as we would that they should do unto us. (Matthew vii. 12.) We shall take no unjust advantage in our dealings, we shall not oppress our fellow-creatures, when we have it in our power; but we shall fulfil the law of kindness unto all; loving our enemies, doing good to them that hate us, and blessing them that curse us, and praying for them that despitefully use us, and persecute us. (Matthew v. 44.) And in our daily conduct and deportment among men, we shall approve ourselves true disciples of the Lord Jesus, in chastity, humility, meekness, sobriety, temperance, and patience. It is thus that Christ becomes all in all to them that believe in him, come unto him, and obediently follow his blessed guidance. And thus shall we know him, as he is described to be "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." (John i. 29.) We shall rejoice in him as our Redeemer, because he has saved us from our sins, and settled our minds in hope of obtaining through the goodness of God, an inheritance in his glorious kingdom in the world to come.

This is pure Religion and true Christianity. It is attainable by all of every class, whatever may be their situation or condition. So that although a sea-faring life may subject those who follow it to many difficulties and discouragements, and may be attended with some temptations peculiar to itself; yet, through the condescending mercy of our Heavenly Parent, the consolations of the gospel, that message of glad tidings of mercy and redemption to poor, sinful man, which is freely offered through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, are

as certainly within the reach of the Sailor and Fisherman, as of those in any other station or employment in life. He who is God of the whole earth, is also God of the great seas: all is the workmanship of his hand; his all-seeing eye beholds us every where, in all circumstances, and in every land. When we are in peril of our lives, and ready to perish with cold and hunger—when our hearts fail us through fear, and we may think that sudden destruction is coming upon us, though we may be out of reach of help from our fellow-men, yet he sees us, and if it please him, he will deliver us. But if in his wisdom, he suffers the continuance of all these hardships, until we even lose all hope of life, he can make us content in all our many troubles, and comfort us in the assurance, that when we leave this world, we shall have peace with him for ever. His ear is always open to our petitions, and though we may not be able to express our wants to him in words, yet as he searches our hearts, and knows our wants, if we ask in submission to his will he will help us. True prayer is the language of the heart, the breathing of the soul to God; so that whether we express our wants in words, or secretly pour forth our souls in sighs and groans before him, we have cause to hope, that our prayers will meet with his gracious regard. If we have none to give us the instruction which we feel we want; if we have no outward minister to remind us of our duty to God and our fellow-creatures; yet, if we take heed to the teaching of the Spirit of Christ in our hearts, we shall never want a teacher, for that will make us wise unto salvation; it will be as a word behind us, when we turn to the right hand, or to the left, saying, "This is the way, walk in it." (Isaiah xx. 21.) If we had the opportunity of frequently at-

tending on the teaching of men, their help might fail us; but this will never fail us; it is in us, and it will abide with us.

Thus might the Lord Almighty be worshipped in Spirit and in Truth by the poor seaman, day by day, while he is toiling upon the deep waters. And thus would the holy religion of the blessed Jesus, bring forth acceptable fruits, so that the great name would be praised by many of our fellow-creatures, who seem to be living in forgetfulness of God, and without concern for their latter end. They would be sober and temperate in their lives and conduct; there would be no more quarrelling or discord among them; they would speak the truth every man to his neighbour; the tongues of those who had once blasphemed the holy name of God, and cursed their fellow-creatures, would be governed by the fear of offending their Maker; and instead of cursing, and wicked wanton words, they would often speak one to another in meekness and kindness, and persuade one another in brotherly love, to join with them in serving the Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Bible, which it is to be feared, is now too much neglected by many among them, would meet with more frequent and serious perusal; and to this profitable employment, we may hope that the Divine Blessing would be graciously added, by increasing their love to God, and their acquaintance with the promises of the Gospel.

Being thus preserved in the fear of the Lord, in their daily occupations on the sea, the poor mariners, when temptations assail them on shore, would be also helped to resist the devil in all his devices, to flee the wicked and deceitful company of those, who in almost every sea-port, are trying to lead them into wantonness and drunkenness,

and endeavouring to spoil the youth of their innocence, and to rob them of the wages, which they have earned, through so many toils and dangers.

But, alas ! where, at the present day, shall we find greater wickedness, and more abominable vice than in some of these places, among our sailors, and their companions in riotous mirth ? And how are they in foreign lands, even where the religion of Christianity is hardly known, violating the law of God's righteousness, and causing his name to be blasphemed among the heathen ? Consider these things, I entreat you. Listen to the voice of God, and flee while you have opportunity to return. Time is short (and uncertain to all : but to you it seems more particularly uncertain. Remember how many of your companions have been called at an unexpected hour; how many who partook with you of the same mess, perhaps but a few months ago, have found a watery grave in the mighty deep. How little do you know, but the next storm may sweep you off this stage of life, and bring you to the bar of the great Judge. Oh ! then, that he that reads, may be brought to fear, and trust in the Lord.

I would now address a few words more particularly to you, young men :—to you, who are now healthy and strong, full of courage, and perhaps looking for many more days. Let me intreat you to remember your Creator now in the days of your youth. It is not too soon for you to seek the Lord, and to think of your latter end. Have you not already heard the voice of his Holy Spirit ? has it not reproved and pleaded with you, and do you not now feel the power of its conviction ? I would hope that the minds of many of you are not so far hardened, that you can sin against God without remorse. Are not your ears shocked, when you

hear the name of the great Preserver of men openly profaned ; and do not your tender hearts now shudder, at what offends your eyes almost every day ? If this be your happy case, Oh ! beware that no man rob you of this heavenly treasure,—the fear of God. Do not forget that you are constantly under the notice of our Almighty Parent ; that he hears your words, and sees your actions, by night as well as by day ; on the sea, as well as by land ; and that although much may be concealed from man, yet nothing can be hid from his all-seeing eye.

Let not any example among your elder associates, or even superiors, induce you to transgress the law of the Lord. Turn a deaf ear to their enticements, and look unto God, and he will help you to bear their revilings and reproach, without anger or impatience. He will give you that sweet peace, which will make your hearts joyful, in the midst of all the sufferings you can endure from wicked men, for his name's sake. Thus, dear young people, would you be preserved in the fear and love of God, in a life of many temptations, and find him a strong hold in every time of trouble. He would be with you in all your many difficulties and dangers, and if you were called from this world in early life, you might hope, that you would be permitted to enter into his kingdom of rest and peace.

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